

March 5, 2015

I am the parent of a 25-year old autistic and intellectually disabled young man.

My son needs a structured, safe environment, and we are lucky to have his day program at Ability Beyond in Bethel. He has thrived while he has been there—he has learned how to communicate his needs by using words instead of banging until there are holes in the walls. At Ability he is surrounded by his peers and professionals who genuinely care about him.

Ability is the only place other than our home where we know he will be safe and secure while we go about our daily lives. Funded through DDS, it is a life-saver both for him, and for us.

My son still lives at home with us and honestly that's not okay—and while we are on the waiting list for residential housing, frankly he should be living with his peers, not his parents. And even though we are on the waiting list, we are growing older and someday we will no longer be able to care for him. It is shameful that Connecticut's idea of housing for him rests on his good luck to have healthy parents, but this will not be the case forever, and sadly, for too many people like him, this is not the case.

Attempting to cut funding for the intellectually disabled is the lowest of lows. How convenient that most of them cannot speak for themselves, how convenient that they have to rely on their parents or others to advocate for them—parents, I might add, like me who have spent their lives constantly fighting school districts and now the government that is supposed to help the needy! How convenient that unlike unions and corporations, these individuals don't have lobbyists and can't write big checks come election time.

It seems that every year the Governor's budget is crafted based on who will complain the least if their budget is cut—rather than who needs it the most. DDS funding is a can that gets kicked to the side of the road too often—I say to Governor Malloy—shame on you for trying to balance the budget on the backs of those whose only voices are often their parents, or their siblings who are worn down and tired from a lifetime of fighting for their charges basic needs. My son is a person, with needs and rights—not a can to be used for political expediency. I ask that you fully fund this bill and stop any more cuts to DDS. It's the only thing standing between our adult intellectually disabled children and catastrophe.

Thank you,

Laura Smits
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